



A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

March 23, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, I am writing to support the goals of your recently released plans to improve the quality and safety of nursing home care—and ask that you work closely with us and others who care deeply about the well-being of nursing home residents to address some of the plan’s proposals related to increased staffing levels and enforcement.

Our members continue their courageous work to care for our nation’s older adults in light of the numerous challenges that the pandemic has brought. Meeting individual needs through all the seasons of life including old age also is part of the mission of Catholic health care. Our eldercare ministries are the legacy of religious communities of women whose selfless, loving motivation in establishing them is still manifest. Preserving this legacy should be a national priority. The proposals outlined in the White House’s fact sheet show the deep commitment from the Administration to “improve the quality of our nursing homes so that seniors, people with disabilities, and others living in nursing homes get the reliable, high-quality care they deserveⁱ.” Catholic nursing homes strongly share this commitment, evidenced by the high marks our facilities receiveⁱⁱ. We stand ready to work with the Administration to address longstanding and systemic issues that have resulted from underinvesting in nursing home care, including racial and ethnic disparities, and offer our thoughts on the following three issues:

Sustainable financing: Through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the federal government must work with states to increase the current reimbursement rates to nursing home providers especially as Medicaid continues to be the largest payer of long-term care services. We wholeheartedly support the importance of this program in the lives of low-income seniors and have a national education campaign, [Medicaid Makes it Possible](#), telling the stories of our members and the beneficiaries we serve. Most importantly we ask that you work with states about their responsibilities to provide full reimbursement for the cost of care. The Medicaid and CHIP Payment Advisory Commission (MACPAC) found that “low Medicaid payment rates may affect a facility’s ability to pay for needed staff and may affect their willingness to accept new Medicaid patientsⁱⁱⁱ.”

Workforce concerns: The national health care workforce shortage has affected nursing homes, with many registered nurses, licensed nurses and certified nurse aide positions remaining unfilled. ECRI, a nationally renowned nonprofit and independent patient safety organization, lists staffing shortages as their number one concern for 2022 that healthcare leaders must address^{iv}. Exacerbating this challenge

is the necessary use of expensive and temporary staffing solutions that drive up the costs of care. Additionally, we know that that women of color and immigrants represent a large segment of the direct care workers at nursing homes. Forthcoming proposals must include initiatives that understand and highlight the value and importance of their work. We ask that your Administration work on a government-wide solution that not only includes the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and CMS but also the Federal Trade Commission and the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Education and Labor to grow and develop the nursing home workforce. We urge you also to involve provider, consumer and academic experts to work on this urgent problem.

Enhancing nursing home oversight through innovative partnerships: Our members continue to focus on quality care for their residents and are committed to patient safety. We understand the role that government surveyors play in helping to protect our vulnerable senior population, however we need to also ensure that we are not simply creating a more punitive and regulated environment and instead are helping to improve care through training and education.

The lessons learned these last two years of the pandemic are an opportunity for CMS to incorporate innovation into their role as a safety regulator by enhancing the public-private partnership that has been successful in the Medicare program. Given the limited resources at federal and state governments devoted to enforcement, we ask that CMS explore how partnering with not-for-profit independent health care accrediting organizations through a deeming relationship can help improve quality. The crisis in nursing homes must be met with an *all-hands* solution that brings the expertise of the health care sector, including those with a demonstrated track record in safety and quality improvement methods. This would allow CMS and state governments to devote their limited funds to poor performing nursing homes. CMS should exercise available regulatory opportunities, including the possibility of a deeming demonstration project from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) to apply evidence-based quality improvement and measurement that results in savings, while guaranteeing the safety of our seniors in nursing homes.

In closing, we ask that your Administration work with CHA, its members, other nursing home providers, consumer advocates and other experts as you embark on the important goal of protecting seniors in our nation's nursing homes. We will continue to provide input and welcome the opportunity to discuss the courageous and compassionate work of our members who are caring for a rapidly aging population. We thank you for your commitment to our nation's seniors and look forward to working together on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM
President and CEO

CC: Xavier Becerra, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

¹ Fact Sheet: Protecting Seniors by Improving Safety and Quality of Care in the Nation's Nursing Homes (February 28, 2022): Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/28/fact-sheet-protecting-seniors-and-people-with-disabilities-by-improving-safety-and-quality-of-care-in-the-nations-nursing-homes/>

² 2020 Catholic Nursing Homes Report (November 17, 2020): Available at: <https://elderguide.com/resources/catholic-nursing-homes-report/#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20our%20raw,most%20non%2DChristian%20affiliated%20facilities.>

³ Medicaid and CHIP Payment Advisory Commission (March 2022): Available at: <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/State-Policy-Levers-to-Address-Nursing-Facility-Staffing-Issues.pdf>

⁴ ECRI, Top 10 Patient Safety Concerns 2022 (March 2022): Available at: <https://www.ecri.org/top-10-patient-safety-concerns-2022>